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ABSTRACT

This document summarizes discussions at an invitational workshop on leadership for development in Nigeria. The following views on the essence of leadership were expressed: (1) the majority of current leaders tend to be selfish, self-centered, and incapable of performing their jobs effectively; (2) most current leaders have impeded the growth of democracy, which, in turn, has impeded development; (3) society's perceptions and expectations of leadership have influenced the current leaders; (4) those leaders who have been appointed to or have inherited their positions appear to lack motivation to be achievers; (5) the performance of national leaders appears to have impeded development; (6) certain leadership qualities need to be nurtured, including toleration of criticism by the press and religious tolerance; (7) national leaders should read the biographies of great leaders of other lands and nations for inspiration; and (8) lack of political challenges and flattery by the press appear to have contributed to the development of insensitivity and arrogance among present leaders. Sustainable development must be based on the following components: (1) knowledge and understanding; (2) quantitative and qualitative information; (3) technological creativity; and (4) organization and skills. The process of development, and particularly local development, must incorporate the democratic spirit in order to be effective. A list of participants and a description of the Africa Leadership Forum are appended. (FMW)

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AFRICA LEADERSHIP FORUM

FARM HOUSE DIALOGUE

Leadership for Development

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Dialogue 1

13 - 14 May, 1988

UD 027 577

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The Farm House Dialogue is one of the programmes of the Africa Leadership Forum. The Dialogue is in form of a quarterly week-end national seminar on issues, subjects or matters of political, economic, technological or social relevance to Nigeria, West Africa, Africa and humanity at large. Farm House Dialogues take place at Obasanjo Farms in Ota, Nigeria. Africa Leadership Forum is substantially funded by the Africa Leadership Foundation and supported by national and international donors.

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FARM HOUSE DIALOGUE - PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES

The Dialogue is neither a political gathering nor is it a gathering to chastise and condemn.

It is basically a brainstorming event. Everyone is at liberty to freely express his or her opinions.

It is a concerned attempt to search for solutions to national problems through discussion.

It does not seek to delve into who brought about particular predicament of the nation, although a knowledge of how the nation got to a specific impasse or difficult situation might provide useful lessons for the future.

It, instead, is an attempt to engage in a proper analysis of national problems and arrive through discussions and dialogue at practical suggestions and recommendations which may help in resolving all or part of these problems.

In consequence, the Dialogue places great emphasis on the selection of individuals to participate in the discussions, noting the importance of inviting always personalities who have knowledge and insights into the particular national issues being discussed and who can make substantial contributions.

It is aimed not always to reach consensus but to provide opportunity for recording honest disagreements on vital national issues.

Each Dialogue will result in a publication that will capture the essence of the discussion and the main conclusions reached.

Dialogue 1

WORKSHOP FOR DEVELOPMENT

Chairman: Chief S.O. Adebo
Rapporteur: Prof.G. O. Olusanya
Editor: Prof. Akin Mobogunje

INTRODUCTION

The first in the series of Farm House Dialogue was held on May 13-14, 1988 at the Obasanjo Farms, Ota far from the hustle and bustle of a metropolis. The Chairman of the occasion was Chief Simeon O. Adebo, a renowned national and international civil servant and diplomat. The participants - thirteen in all - were carefully selected for their knowledge and expertise as well as their exposure in the public service of Nigeria. Many were well-known to themselves while a few others were meeting for the first time. (See list of participants).

The topic for this first dialogue was: "Leadership for Development". It was agreed that this topic could be addressed in three parts:

1. Essence of Leadership
2. Leadership and the Concept of Development
3. Leadership and the Democratic Spirit and Democratic Institutions.

Each of these parts was taken up in each of three sessions. The approach to, and the tone of, the discussion were at the beginning exploratory but gradually the exchanges became more lively and well focussed. Below is a summary of the salient issues that emerged from the discussions.

ESSENCE OF LEADERSHIP

A starting point for examining this aspect of the problem was to determine what constitutes the essence of leadership. In this regard, a number of other pertinent questions were raised. These included: Who are leaders? How is leadership defined? What are the roles for leaders? How is leadership acquired? Are leaders born or made? How is leadership exercised?

It was observed that these questions were important because the tendency in the Nigerian society was to talk about leaders or leadership only in terms of the few individuals who occupied the apex of government and the private sector. Thus, leaders are conceived as only those persons holding highly visible positions in government and industries. The media has helped to encourage this view of who are the leaders by focussing incessantly on this group. Part of the reason for this over-emphasis is no doubt the fact that in an underdeveloped country, government activities are so dominant that those who carry them out at the top level appear to be the only leaders in the system.

Nonetheless, it was agreed that for leadership in whatever field certain qualities, apart from deliberate preparation, were critical for success. These include, among others, humility, honesty, commitment to hard work, ability to conceive programmes of permanent value, firmness, fairness, vision, patriotism and integrity. The task of preparing individuals to assume leadership role in any field must consequently entail devising ways and means of imprinting on potential leaders these many qualities of leadership, apart from establishing criteria for identifying such individuals. This was certainly one of the basic objectives for the establishment of the National Institute at Kuru.

The Africa Leadership Forum must thus be seen as a complementary private counterpart of the National Institute, albeit with a wider continental mandate. However, if these two centres and others that may be established in future were to serve their purpose well, great care must be taken in selecting the individuals who are sent to or are invited to them.

Within the context of the experiences represented at this first Dialogue, the following views on current societal leadership were noted:

(i) majority of leaders in the society have tended to be selfish, self-centered and incapable, in most cases, of performing effectively;

(ii) most leaders by their actions and inclinations have made it near impossible to develop a democratic tradition. As long as such leaders direct governments which, in turn, control every aspect of the national economy, development will continue to elude the country;

(iii) society's perception of and expectation from its leaders cannot be divorced from the way these leaders got to their position;

(iv) ascriptive leaders in the country or those individuals born into leadership positions (traditional rulers, etc.) do not seem to care much to be achievers. It is only those upon whom leadership is thrust or who achieved it by dint of hard work that become great achievers;

(v) in most developing countries including Nigeria, the performance of leaders to date have made governments to become an instrument for underdevelopment, rather than its opposite;

(vi) in Nigeria, it would appear that certain criteria for leadership peculiar to the country such as tolerance to press criticisms, a personal approach to religious belief and so on are starting to emerge. It would be necessary to think of ways in which these can be institutionalized. Institutions, such as, the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru, must be further re-dedicated towards producing good leaders and responsible people in the society.

(vii) national leaders can derive great inspiration from reading biographies of great leaders of other lands and nations, in addition to our own;

(viii) one of the serious shortcomings amongst Nigerian leaders is their lack of sustained exposure to leadership challenges and their consequent shallow sensitivity and arrogance. It was noted that the Nigerian Press contributed to this latter trait by overplaying the rhetorics of leaders and blowing their minor achievements out of proportion.

It may, of course, be argued that the Press' attitude to the leaders can not be divorced from that of the society of which it is a part. In a society that is over-governed, the Press tends to concentrate on the political leadership, its activities and pronouncements. This obsessive focus provokes some concern about the Press' image of its own role in society, whether this is seen as embracing changing society or simply reflecting its strength and inadequacies. As of now, it must be admitted that the Press and the media as a whole have lost sight of their overall responsibility. Nonetheless, it was acknowledged that although there are other kinds of leaders, notably religious leaders, the political leadership of an underdeveloped country such as Nigeria was the most important because its role in shaping and moulding other kinds of leadership is almost pervading.

LEADERSHIP AND THE CONCEPT OF DEVELOPMENT

In examining this second issue of leadership and the concept of development, a simple definition of development as change or a transformation into a better state was regarded as a useful starting point. This was important because the word "development" itself had undergone a great deal of change in the literature. In the past, it was conceived of narrowly as no more than an increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Nowadays, emphasis is placed on the content of the GDP as well as on other dimensions of the quality of life encompassing such social indicators as infant mortality, shifts in social status, employment opportunity, life expectancy, decrease in fertility, housing, water supply, nutrition, etc. In short, development now emphasizes people as the object of attention. It is no longer just about growth in the volume of goods and commodities. It is now to be thought of as a process concerned with people's capacity in a defined area over a defined period to manage and induce change; that is, to predict, plan, understand and monitor change and reduce or eliminate unwanted or unwarranted change. Thus, the more people develop themselves, the more they would become instruments for further change. Increases in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) could then be seen as intermediate in the process, that is, such increases are the product of the change process and the input for further change. Education was identified as the key to people's ability to manage and induce change. It develops the ability to face the challenges of making choices while also increasing the choices available.

Given this definition of the concept of development, the question was asked as to how to manage or induce change in a large population such as we have in Nigeria. Is this where the issue of

leadership becomes crucial? Does development, for instance, involve the ability of a nation to conduct free and fair elections, and thereby ensure smooth political transition? Or, is the concept of development one that can be grasped first at a limited level before it can be extended to society as a whole? How are leaders meant to grapple with such a concept?

The challenge of providing a simple answer to these various questions was illustrated by one participant in the following vivid and rather imaginative way. According to him as he drives to work every day, he notices a signboard on the way with the inscription: "Christ is the answer". He was always left wondering what was the question. It had been assumed so far that leadership in Nigeria was a problem in a very general way without proper articulation of what it is a problem of. As such, it was treated as an independent variable without being linked specifically with the Nigerian society. The question could thus be asked whether it was possible to have a good leadership emerging in the Nigerian situation? Even if the search was extended beyond political leadership, what sort of leadership has emerged in other areas of societal endeavours?

At the level of local government, for example, is it possible to have a leader that is not from the major ethnic community in the area? Is it possible to have a leader who is not a contract giver and patronage disher? Since at least for now the answer to these questions must in most cases be in the negative, it must be admitted that leadership cannot be considered in isolation except in relation to society's structural characteristics. It was concluded that leadership in Nigeria remains problematic because it is not an independent variable but is mixed up with other variables. For a change or development to take

place in the country, therefore, there is need to engage in raising the people or society as a whole above these various structural constraints and in creating appropriate machinery for bringing this about.

It may, of course, be asked that if development is about people, how do people relate to the necessary and appropriate machinery for breaking down the structural constraints impeding change? The answer, it was agreed, was that people must be seen as both the agent and the object of change. As agent of change, people need to be disciplined if they are really desirous of getting out of the morass of underdevelopment. The first challenge of leadership in regard to the concept of development is how to create or achieve a disciplined society. A disciplined society must not be assumed to be a repressed society. It is thus possible to conceive of such a society giving ample opportunity for the flowering of independent radical minds.

Not unexpectedly, there were reservations that, given the pervasive corruption and the present political set-up of the country, it may be an empty hope to expect the emergence of a disciplined and moral political leadership. In cautioning against such pessimism, it was observed that, despite its many failings, the Shagari period of ruling the country can be viewed as progress in the political development of the nation because it provided an opportunity for civilians 'to mess' around. Its value must be in terms of the concrete example it provides as to how national disasters can occur and what lessons for improved leadership it provides. Clearly, what Nigeria has been going through in the last three decades must be seen as the pangs and pains of the birth of a strong and united nation.

If development is about people, then the people constitute a repository of energy for development and it is the careful release of this energy that constitutes development. The major factor in development is mental. The elite in the country needs to clear its mind about this to prevent the nation moving fast in the wrong direction. It is recognised that the nation's economy is based largely on foreign capital.

It may, of course, be asked that if development is about people, how do people relate to the necessary and appropriate machinery for breaking down the structural constraints impeding change? The answer, it was agreed,

Should this continue? How does this relate to the concept of development as people developing themselves?. Or, to the establishment of democratic institutions at the grassroots level.

Whichever way it is considered, development cannot be development if it cannot be sustained over the long run. For this to be the case, development must be seen as a free release of the energy of the people. This release can come about only with education - the right kind of education and in its widest sense. Such education will facilitate the emergence of a political structure that will throw up the right kind of leaders. This, of course, does not take account of the external environment which cannot always be taken for granted or assumed to be favourable and supportive. Indeed, in the case of Nigeria, it has been suggested that the country was being gradually recolonised as its economy became weakened. This has given rise to growing disenchantment and cynicism about the development process. The issue of the external environment of development was considered of sufficient importance to merit a session of a dialogue on its own.

Disenchantment, it was observed, was a state of mind which a developing country cannot afford to foster. Where it starts to get a hold on the mind of the people there is a clear need for mental re-orientation. In Nigeria, this must be seen as one of the challenges confronting MAMSER. Its programme of adult education must be directed to encompass the inculcation of the right attitude of mind to development and, more importantly, to instil an appreciation of the critical importance of self and group discipline.

Development, furthermore, must be understood as not entailing populism. It is about getting on with the jobs that people do. In the extreme, it can be said to have less to do with what government does. It is not just about consuming; it is also about producing. It is not concerned with buying of technology but with the creation of the

technology needed by the people themselves and their capacity to manage their own affair. In other words, development entails:

(a) knowledge and understanding;
(b) information - statistical and non-statistical;
(c) technological creativity and
(d) the right kind of organisation and skill.

It is the combination of these four factors that ensures the capacity of people to achieve sustainable growth. It is not just rushing ahead to spend windfall gains from a non-renewable resource like petroleum which has been the bane of the country. This has also meant living on a surplus accruing from outside our own productive capabilities and under the control of government. It has, in consequence, led to a failure to properly address the issue of national development.

Against this background, what is the role and significance of development plans? Conventionally, these are documents for which a small group of experts, mainly economists, are generally responsible for the preparation and to a large extent for the execution and monitoring. When at the end of the day such a plan fails to achieve many of its objectives, this same group sometimes turns round and blames the political leadership. The reality, of course, is that the nation has been made to try to plan from up down. It is incumbent that planning now starts from below upwards. Economic planning and development must be seen as the concern of all and not of economists alone.

Nonetheless, it was stressed that the existence of a good plan is not enough as a basis for achieving development. There must be, in addition, a political leadership that has the vision, the education, the will, the credibility and the capacity to manage the process of change, and a followership that is ready to change its attitude, its ways and its taste. This is vital if the people must be taken into confidence. The role of the leaders is to fix priorities and guide the society to appreciating the imperative of these.

The effectiveness of leaders in achieving this objective would of course depend on their own qualities and on the arrangements for their succession. Those who aspire to lead must have an irreducible minimum level of education, exposure and moral fibre.

What institutions exist or can be devised to assist in moulding and bringing up this kind of leadership? The Africa Leadership Forum is certainly one such institution but it cannot be the only one. There exist tremendous opportunities for many other initiatives in this matter. This is particularly so as it must be admitted that many of the leaders the country has had so far have shown so little patriotic interest in their mission. This is true whether one thought of leadership at the Federal or at State level. It is, however less true of leadership at the community level. As such, it was suggested that in the present circumstances of Nigeria, minimum government may be the solution. This conclusion is not meant to be raised to the level of an ideology but needs to be considered as a plausible option in the present circumstances. This is even more compelling, given the fact that most of the resources for development presently at the disposal of governments tend to come from outside the country and hence tend to limit the extent to which government can self-reliantly undertake the development of the country. From this perspective, the prospects of real development lie in the establishment of democratic institutions at all levels in the country. This conclusion focuses special attention on the place of local government in the development process. In Nigeria, the concept of local government remains unsatisfactory. Local government areas are generally too large and fail to properly take into account the interest of communities and small groups. Local governments have not been enabled to move into the next stage of their development which is the organisation of their constituent communities. To rectify the present situation, it was agreed that the following would need to be done:

(i) ministries of local government would need to be drastically reformed if not abolished. At present, they are a hindrance to the evolution of responsible leadership at the local level;

(ii) local government should be free of state governments control just as state governments are free of Federal government control except for consultation and cooperation on concurrent activities;

(iii) secretaries to Local governments should not be appointed by state governments;

(iv) in order that Local Government may be meaningful, viable and capable to act like a proper third tier of government, fragmentation should be avoided. Each local government should, however, be allowed to create community development committees on the basis of affinity and contiguity of the peoples within its area of jurisdiction.

(vi) local government should be the main instrument of rural development.

DEMOCRATIC SPIRIT AND DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

The democratic spirit was defined as a commitment to follow a democratic way of doing things at all possible times along with the responses that enable that spirit to thrive. It helps to emphasize that a change freely accepted will endure more than an imposed one. It also underscores why there is no need to panic when democracy is in crisis, especially where there is a total commitment to democracy.

Put in this way, the issue for Dialogue becomes how the democratic principle is to be enshrined in practice. Is it through an institutional opposition or the proliferation of newspapers, for instance?

First and foremost, it was agreed that an important factor for enshrining the democratic spirit in practice is to create the right

atmosphere for fundamental human rights to flourish. Democracy must entail the expression of the other point of view.

The question was raised as to how difficult it was to adhere to the democratic spirit under a condition of underdevelopment. This is because one may know that a measure is good for the society but the generality of the people may not and may therefore be opposed to it. In such a situation, one view was that such a programme should not be implemented until the people are carried along, as to its necessity. Another was that government could proceed with such a measure as long as it was convinced that it was in the interest of the people, without caring to carry them along. The first school of thought believes that consultation with the people is not only a process of information management but a veritable training ground for the people in democracy. This view came to have general acceptance.

The role of interest groups in a democratic society was also highlighted. The issue was raised as to why interest groups were not used to throw up leaders and why there was much obsession with the western forms of interest articulation through the formation of political parties. It was agreed that conventional interest groups are too narrow in their range of concerns, hence the need for them to concentrate under the larger umbrella of political parties. The virtues of the Western form of democratic organisation should not be dismissed out of hand. The right attitude is to study the various forms of their manifestation and operations seriously and intelligently, identify what in them are of value to us, and adapt these to our own peculiar circumstances or situation.

Education for Development and, in particular, for Local Development must be seen as veritable agencies in this arduous task of democratic learning and adaptation. As such, it was agreed that it deserves to have a full session of Dialogue discussion on its own at a future date.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

General O. Obasanjo, Former Head of State of Nigeria and Chairman, Africa Leadership Forum

Chief S. O. Adebo, Former Nigerian Permanent Representative at the United Nations and former Executive Director of UNITAR

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Prof. Claude Ake, Professor of Political Science, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria

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BACKGROUND NOTE ON THE AFRICA LEADERSHIP FORUM

Despite over a quarter of a century of political independence, Africa's aspirations and hopes remain today largely unfulfilled. This has not been, however, a period of unmitigated failure in the history of the continent; there have been successes in education, public health, import substitution industries, and in the continuing process of decolonization. The problems of development, peace and security, the health of the world economy, and improving the environment are interrelated global issues; they do not admit of piecemeal solutions.

And yet all countries find that in the absence of true global cooperation, they have to tackle particular aspects of them. At the national level in Africa, the inadequacy of information, data, and resources render the problems daunting. Regionally they are overwhelming.

African leaders have frequently come to their positions with limited experience. Though most of them have battled on, confronting their awesome problems of development and nation-building essentially not only unprepared but unaided, their efforts have been at best only a qualified success.

Africa cannot afford to continue with ill-prepared and unassisted leaders. Those on whom the burden of leadership will fall in future must fully comprehend their responsibilities, duties, and obligations. They must, that is, have exposure and carefully planned preparation if they are to meet the challenges that will face them.

The leaders of tomorrow, however, today have to be pursuing their professional careers. They have little time to devote to gaining a comprehensive knowledge of their own countries and their region, nor of the cultures of their diverse peoples. Nor even to learning about and understanding the actions taken by their present leaders where they do not impinge on their own areas of expertise.

Most young potential leaders have focused primarily on single issues,lacking time to look at wider, critical regional and world challenges. Time for comprehensive study and reflection, for sharing experiences with persons inside, let alone outside, their countries, region, and field of concentration is very limited. Opportunities for such detached discussion and contemplation are even rarer.

There are no private institutions in Africa devoted to preparing potential leaders with a global outlook, leaders who will be able to cooperate within and across national, regional, and institutional boundaries. Further, it is difficult, if not impossible, in many African countries to gain access to relevant and timely information on most national, regional, and global issues.

Experience in and out of Government and in international fora bears out this situation, one which poses a challenge to address and remedy. One solution is to hold periodically the "Africa Leadership Forum" - a series which may be national, subregional, regional and international in dimension and may vary in duration. The purpose will be to enhance the knowledge and awareness of young, potential African leaders, placing special emphasis on diagnosing apparent failures of the past; on understanding multiple dimensions and complex interrelations of local, national, regional, and global problems; and on seeking possible approaches to solutions.

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the Forum is to encourage diagnosis, understanding, and an informed search for solutions to local, regional and global problems, taking full account of their interrelationships and mutual consequences.

To that end, the Forum will develop, organize and support programmes for the training of young

and promising Africans with leadership potential so as to expose them to the demands, duties and obligations of leadership positions and to prepare them systematically for assuming higher responsibilities and meeting the challenges of an interdependent world.

The Forum will also endeavour to generate greater understanding and enhance the knowledge and awareness of development and social problems within a global context among young, potential leaders from all sectors of society, cutting across national, regional, continental, professional and institutional borders. This may foster close and enduring relationships among participants, relationships promoting life-long association and cooperation.

Further, the Forum will support and encourage the diagnosis and informed search for appropriate and effective solutions to local and regional African problems and to global problems from an African perspective - within the framework of global interdependence -, including consideration of phased action programmes that can be initiated by various countries, sub-regions and institutions.

In addition, there will be specific weekend seminars organized as Farm House Dialogues to be held quarterly. The first of the Dialogues entitled "Leadership for Development" was held on 13-14 May 1988.

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